



Mother-Daughter Masters

Rising through the ranks together, Patti Barnum and Kelli Shoup inspire each other to achieve.

by Susan T. Lennon

Nearly 30 years ago, an ordinary shopping trip took a dangerous turn when a group of thugs surrounded Master Patti Barnum, then 25, and her two young children. Clutching her infant daughter Kyle's carriage and holding tight to toddler Kelli's hand, Barnum searched for an escape while her mind raced.

"I felt vulnerable and afraid," she says, the memory still fresh today. "I couldn't run away and had no idea what to do."

Luckily, something or someone scared off the would-be attackers, and as Barnum rushed her girls into the mall, she made a promise to herself: "I will do whatever it takes to protect my children, and never be defenseless again."

A Mother's Commitment

To keep that promise, Barnum soon signed up for a six-week ATA Taekwondo self-defense class. As the course ended, Barnum realized she'd learned just enough to know there was much more to learn! "I still didn't feel capable of protecting my children," she says, "and I was more aware of the dangers."

Barnum continued her ATA training after the class ended, and as she practiced and grew stronger, daughters Kelli and Kyle watched from the sidelines.

Both girls wanted to participate, Barnum says, but children under age 12 were not allowed to train at her school. Still, by age 5, daughter Kelli was practicing forms on her own and begging to enroll. The school's instructor made an exception when Barnum, then a red belt, agreed to teach the smaller children. Together, mother and daughter launched their martial arts careers.

A Daughter's Response

"For a long time, Kelli was the only young kid in the class, but from that day on, she never missed a week of training," Barnum says, beaming. "Her commitment is phenomenal."

Barnum is now 54 and a 6th Degree Black Belt. She achieved Master rank in 2002. Her daughter, Master candidate Kelli Shoup, is now 31. Kelli trained throughout her childhood and began teaching other children at age 14. At school, she wrote papers about why her mom was her hero and how her goal was to follow in her footsteps and make Taekwondo her profession.

Careful to separate her goals from those of her daughter, Barnum gave Kelli other options, too. "I took piano lessons, became a cheerleader and even went to college part-time for three years," Kelli says, "but I'd set my true passion and focus in life early, and nothing could compare."

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Kelli has attended every World Championship tournament since she was a tot and long ago set her sights on Mastership. At World Championships this June, 26 years after starting her formal instruction, Kelli will realize her dream of becoming a Master.

"One thing Taekwondo teaches you is to create goals," Barnum says. "Kelli aimed high. To sit on the stage and watch her attain what she set out so long ago to achieve ..." Barnum takes a deep breath, "I don't know who will be happier—Kelli or me."

Barnum and Shoup own and teach at Taekwondo USA and Karate for Kids in Darien and Homewood, Ill. They live one mile apart and call each other "best friends."

A Family Affair

Kelli met her husband Keith Shoup, a 4th Degree Black Belt, at Worlds. "As a kid, I knew I'd need to marry someone within Taekwondo," she says, "someone who would understand my work and keep the same hours."

Kelli's father and step-father both trained and earned black belts, and her maternal grandmother, Betty Kucharski, 79, works at one of the school offices twice a week. "My mom is phenomenal," Barnum says. "If she'd been born in my generation, she'd be a Master, too."

Help Your Kid Commit!

How can parents help their kids stick with a chosen activity? Master candidate Kelli Shoup laughs: "The best way is to join and do it with them!" And Taekwondo allows that kind of participation. Parents can't run around on a soccer field with their children, but Taekwondo embraces people of all ages.

Better yet, ATA Taekwondo provides a strong, values-centered environment in which families can flourish and stay close. Explains Master Patti Barnum: "You travel to tournaments together, know who [your kids'] friends are, and never run out of things to talk about. Plus," she adds, "training together teaches you to respect your child's efforts." —S. T. L.

Kelli was at her ATA school when she went into labor with her son, Kolton, now 2, who could punch before he could stand. Four months pregnant during her mandatory Mastership mountain climbing event, Shoup hopes her new baby will also find Taekwondo irresistible.

Kyle Cuiching, Kelli's sister, loves training, too. At 29, Kyle has been alive as long as her mother has been training. A 4th Degree Black Belt, Cuiching is currently sidelined by multiple sclerosis, but she couldn't be happier for her sister.

"I'm just so proud of her," Cuiching says. "I remember when my mom got her Mastership—it just touched my heart. And my sister has been so dedicated for so long, it's just amazing that now she's a Master, too." **ATA**

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